

# Landmark ruling sets strong precedent in sex trafficking cases

Originally published September 6, 2015 at 4:03 pm

**The Washington State Supreme Court's wise decision to allow a case against Backpage.com to proceed sets a new precedent that might save children nationwide from being sold for sex online.**

By [Seattle Times editorial board](#)

*The Seattle Times*

THREE survivors of child prostitution in Washington can finally seek justice against Backpage.com, the nation's most well-known online marketplace for commercial sex.

In a [6-3 decision](#) Thursday, the Washington State Supreme Court ruled the girls can proceed with a lawsuit that was first filed in 2012.

Backpage.com's attorneys have since tried to get the case dismissed. They argue the website, owned and maintained by Village Voice Media Holdings, is not liable for third-party ads posted in its adult section and is protected by the federal Communications Decency Act.

No one can say with a straight face that federal law was meant to allow children to be sold online and repeatedly raped by buyers.

After analyzing arguments presented before them last October, a majority of the state's justices concluded that the plaintiffs "have alleged sufficient facts that, if proved, would show that the defendants helped to produce the illegal content and therefore are subject to liability under state law."

Not only does Backpage.com continue to provide a channel for pimps to post thinly veiled ads for prostitution, it makes millions off the practice. According to a 2012 AIM Groupestimate, Backpage.com earns more than \$22 million annually from sex ads.

The ruling sets a precedent nationwide and opens the doors for other victims of child sex trafficking to take legal action.

Here in Washington, two of the victims in this case were in the seventh grade and a third was 15 at the time they were under the control of pimps and sold online repeatedly on a daily basis.

Now begins the process of discovery, which may lead to a trial down the line that could finally hold Backpage.com and copycat websites accountable for promoting and profiting from the commercial sexual exploitation of children.

The legal battle is not over. Far from it.

But thanks to this landmark ruling by the state Supreme Court, three young victims and their families can keep up the good fight — and protect other kids from suffering the trauma they still battle every day.

*Editorial board members are editorial page editor Kate Riley, Frank A. Blethen, Ryan Blethen, Brier Dudley, Mark Higgins, Jonathan Martin, Thanh Tan, Blanca Torres, William K. Blethen (emeritus) and Robert C. Blethen (emeritus).*